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Legal Secretary's Complete Handbook by Bessie May Miller

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remind one of the course given in one of the leading law schools which students used to refer to as the "Case-A-Month Club"; or to the course in another of our larger law schools where the instructor was reported by a student to have given a whole semester to the consideration of a single case. The report stated that by the middle of the semester none of the students knew just what the case stood for and by the end of the semester the instructor admitted that he himself did not know. If, as is sometimes said, the real aim of teaching is to make the student think, it may be possible for the conscientious student, who is anxious to master the art of legal thinking and who does not resort to "canned" notes, to get as much training from this type of treatise as he could get from one of the conventional casebooks. He will at least get much better physical training lugging a tome of this size and weight to and from classes than he would from the smaller volume. After all, a student's time in the law school is limited. Professor Beale once said that in the three years the law school can develop a student to the point where the student can make a noise like a lawyer.

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LEGAL SECRETARY'S COMPLETE HANDBOOK. By Bessie May Miller. New York, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953. Pp. xxii, 662, incl. index.

This handbook is an invaluable addition to the desk of a legal secretary, and particularly is this true in the case of beginners. The author has succeeded in her intention of compiling a work which will be a safe guide in matters of attitude, scope and limitation of duties, and above all in the efficient performance of the diverse tasks assigned in her day-to-day work, tasks of a specialized sort not encountered in other secretarial work.

The book has been divided into five parts, under these headings: "Usual Duties in a Law Office," "Preparing Legal Instruments," "Courts and Litigation," "Assisting in Specialized Practice," and "Reference Material." It is in the second part, "Preparing Legal Instruments," in the third, "Courts and Litigation," and in the fifth, "Reference Material," that the usual worker will find the greatest aid. Specific questions are answered specifically and the reader, however exacting, is certain to gain the information (or an avenue to it) which is sought. The subheadings in Part II of "Distinctive Features of Dictation and Typing," "Basic Information about Legal Instruments," and "Specific Instruments; Affidavits; Powers of Attorney; Wills" indicate what a

present help this handbook can be, as does the fact that the writer has availed herself of the experience and counsel of an Advisory Committee of eleven and of a Legal Committee of forty-eight (one from each state), all of whom are outstanding legal secretaries. Miss Beatrice S. McDonald of Frankfort is Kentucky's representative.

On second thought, it is a mistake to suggest that one division of this excellent work is more helpful than another. Indeed, its usefulness is limited only by the researcher's need. Whatever information the secretary may be seeking, whether it be a matter of office department, punctuation, form, filing, bibliographical research, terminology or accounts-keeping, she is assured of finding it authoritatively and understandably stated in "The Legal Secretary's Complete Handbook."

The beginner, however, should be cautioned against expecting to encompass within her own experience (in anything less than say, thirty years) the wealth of advice, encouragement and information available. Like certain other handbooks, this one occasionally seems to have been written for an unknown race; it presupposes secretaries, as well as employers, of only ideal proportions and possibilities. The reviewer regards the statements quoted below with awe and respectfully suggests that the beginner not regard them with unmodified credence:

"The lawyer likes to look upon his secretary as his partner."

"On a new job the lawyer . . . will expect you to observe the following precepts without instruction from him.

.....
 "6. Judge which clients the employer will welcome, which he wants to avoid, which should be seen by another lawyer in the firm, and which you should take care of yourself.

"7. Make explanations to those callers whom the lawyer will not see, without antagonizing the caller."

"It can be taken for granted that anyone who has aspired to be a secretary to a lawyer has learned good manners and that politeness, friendliness, graciousness, and consideration for others are well-established habits."

"There are innumerable situations, but by exercising discretion and diplomacy you will soon be able to handle them all."

None of this, however, should be construed as detracting from the great practical value of this handbook, designed as it is to furnish complete information about requirements of each of the forty-eight states. A perusal of the careful, comprehensive index indicates the wealth of detailed data available, with examples, illustrations and tables to clarify difficult points. "The Legal Secretary's Handbook" should be welcomed by every secretary in a law office who wishes to improve her work.

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